

1-1-2013

# Perceived Persistence Factors For African American Students At A Predominantly White Institution

Aaron D. White

*Eastern Illinois University*

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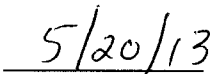
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Predominantly White Institution

By

Aaron D. White

April 2013

A Thesis

Submitted to


Eastern Illinois University

In partial fulfillment of the requirement


For the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN COLLEGE STUDENT AFFAIRS  
Department of Counseling and Student Development in the Graduate School  
Eastern Illinois University

We recommend that this thesis be accepted as fulfilling part of the requirement for the  
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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mom, WillieMae Clark. The support you have giving me throughout my life and especially throughout my college experience goes far beyond words. You believed in me when others doubted me. You encouraged me when I wanted to give up. All my accomplishments in life are not mines alone, but yours as well. Thanks for your never ending love and support. I love you mom!!!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First I would like to thank God because without him none of this would be possible. Thank you for guiding me through the many struggles I encountered throughout my life and shaping me into a stronger person along the way.

Dr. James A. Wallace, my professor, my mentor, my friend, and my role model. Thanks for all your support during my graduate experience. You motivated me from day one. You challenged me to be great. You believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. Thank you for all the times I came in your office for a simple answer and left with a life lesson. I still find myself going to your office just to have a little talk, but the closed door reminds me that you're no longer with us. However, I know you're in heaven smiling down and saying "Dr. White I'm proud of you." Thanks for everything Dr. Wallace and I will never forget you.

Dr. James Harden, my undergraduate professor and mentor, thanks for opening my eyes to a whole new world of possibilities. Thanks for all your support during my transition from undergrad to graduate school. Thanks for seeing something in me and pushing me to be great.

Dr. Timm, my thesis chair, thanks for always pushing me to do better and strive for excellence. Your support over the last two years has been a major factor in my success. Your genuine concern for me not only as a student but as a person goes far beyond the duties of a professor and that's what makes you great. Thanks for all your support throughout my graduate journey.

Dr. Polydore, my committee member, my professor, and role model. Thanks for providing me with the opportunity to be successful. You have a kind heart that shows

through your actions. I honestly don't think I would be in the position I am in today if not for you. You provided me the opportunity to pursue my dreams and for that I'm forever thankful.

Dr. Davenport, my committee member and mentor. Thanks for all your help throughout my college journey. You have helped me grow tremendously over the last couple of years. Thank you for helping me find my love for working in higher education. Thanks for providing me with opportunities I needed to grow as a professional as well as a person. Words cannot express how thankful I am for all you have done for me.

Lastly, to my Coloring The Path (CTP) family. You all have been so supportive and inspiring over these last two years. You all picked me up when I was feeling down at times and never allowed me to quit or slack off. We laughed together and cried together. The most important thing is that we all made it together. The relationships that we have formed are going to last a life time. I love each and everyone one of you. Thanks for being my brothers and sisters.



## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine what resources, persistence factors, and motivational factors influenced African American students matriculation at a PWI located in the Midwest. The participants in this study were six African American seniors or recent graduates of a mid-sized, four-year university in the rural Midwest. Motivation, persistence, and resources are each connected to one another and as students identified factors in each area it was evident that together they all influence the overall success, which is completing their undergraduate degree, in significant ways. The results of this study provided a personal look into areas which the institution and administrators need to address to continue to help African American students matriculate through the university and achieve academic success.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

It is well documented that in this great nation we call the United States of America, Blacks and Whites were not allowed at one time to use the same restroom, drink from the same water fountain, eat at the same restaurants, shop at the same stores, or even attend the same school. During the peak of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s many of these unequal and unfair laws were disposed of through the court system. The landmark case that changed the face of our education system was *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which ruled the principle “separate but equal” unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 1954).

Prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the Higher Education Act of 1965, Blacks seeking higher education had only one option, attending a Historically Black University (HBCU). Until the 1960s, more than 90% of the African Americans enrolled in higher education in this country were educated at HBCUs (Conrad & Kim, 2006). There are currently 103 HBCUs and 50 predominantly Black institutions located in the United States. However, according to Conrad and Kim by 1996 only 17% of Black students enrolled in college attended one of the 103 HBCUs in the country.

*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the Higher Education Act of 1965 opened up the door for Black students to enroll at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). The courts desegregation of schools may have been a law, but not everyone abided by the law. Black students at PWIs experienced issues such as racial discrimination, lack of academic support, and social isolation, which those at HBCUs did

not necessarily experience (Wilson & Constantine, 1999). These issues can contribute to Black students at PWIs experiencing lower academic achievement, lower persistence rates, poorer overall psychological development, less likelihood of enrolling in advanced degree programs, and lower post-graduation attainments and earnings (Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrand, 2001).

One obstacle that many African American students face at predominantly White institutions is persistence (Rowser, 1997). Retention is defined by the federal government as “the tracking of a full-time student in a degree program over time (6yrs/4yr college, 3yrs/2yr college) to determine whether the student has completed the program” (Center for the Study of College Student Retention, n.d). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.) persistence is

the measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, expressed as a percentage. For four-year institutions, this is the percentage of first-time bachelors (or equivalent) degree-seeking undergraduates from the previous fall who are again enrolled in the current fall. For all other institutions this is the percentage of first-time degree/certificate-seeking students from the previous fall who either re-enrolled or successfully completed their program by the current fall.

In regards to retention, one mistake that PWIs make is not meeting the needs of its Black students and part of this may be because a lack of knowledge about these students’ needs (Rowser, 1997). According to Rowser, (1997) “African American students enter the university with rather well-defined self-perceptions of their academic preparation, personal and social needs, and career aspiration” (p.719). Black students must deal with

the typical pressures of school and at the same time handle cultural biases and learn how to bridge his or her Black culture with the prevailing one at the PWI (Sedlacek, 1987).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine what resources, persistence factors, and motivational factors influenced African American students matriculation at a PWI located in the Midwest from here on referred to by the pseudonym, Midwest University. Resources are programs or services implemented by the university to aid or support a student's progress from one academic year to the next. Persistence factors are people, groups, or organizations that aid or support a student's remaining at an institution from one academic year to the next. Motivation factors are people, groups, or organizations that initiate and sustain a student's enrollment at an institution of higher learning. Motivational factors can appear prior to a student's enrollment at an institution as well as while they are enrolled. In identifying what resources, persistence factors, and motivational factors influenced matriculation of African Americans students, student affairs personnel and faculty will be able to better address the needs of its Black student body and develop appropriate support mechanisms. This study also identified factors influencing persistence related to gender. The findings of this study will help higher education professionals develop programs and strategies for retaining Black students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

African American students face many challenges at predominantly White institutions (Gruiffida, 2004; Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2007; Rowser, 1997). In regards to retention, one mistake that PWIs make is not meeting the needs of its Black students and part of this may be due to the fact that they do not know what their

needs are (Rowser, 1997). This study was designed to examine the resources, motivational factors, and persistence factors that led African American college students to graduate at Midwestern University.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed by the researcher and will guide the present study.

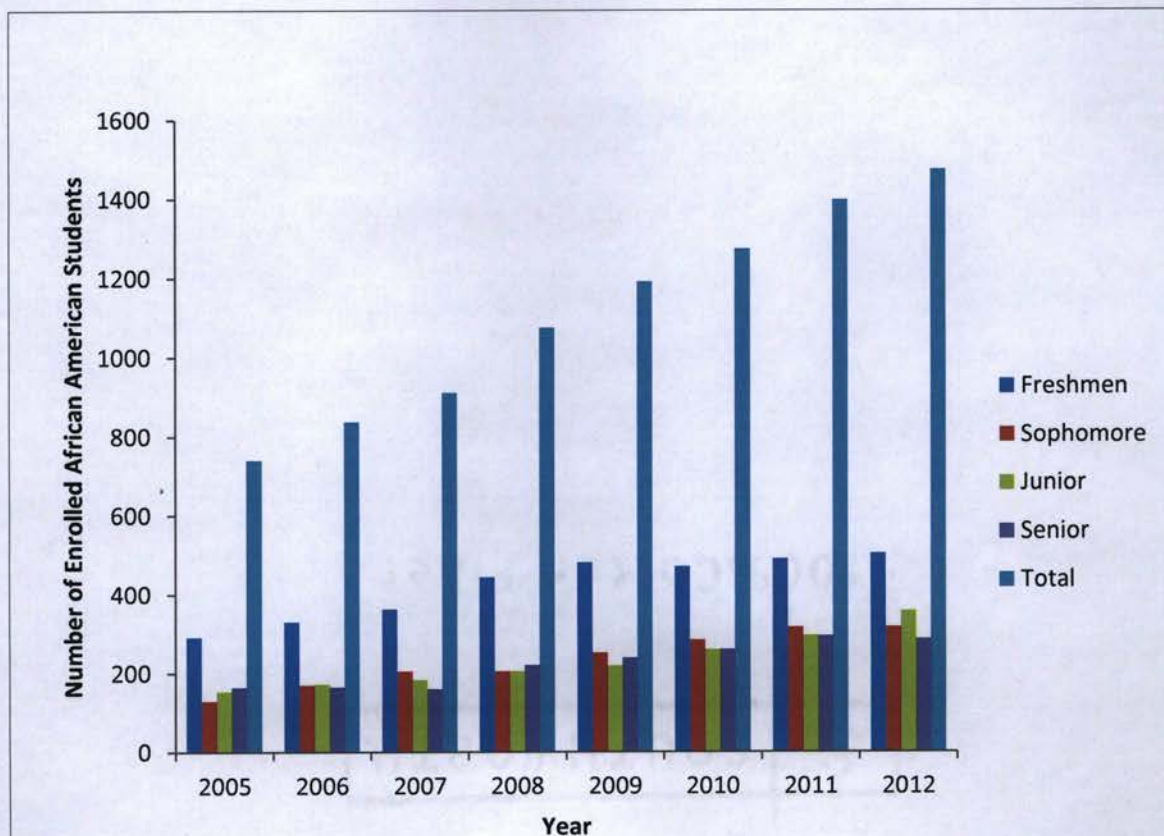
1. What motivates African American students to stay at the institution?
2. What persistence factors influence African American students through to graduation?
3. What resources do African American students identify as helping them successfully graduate from the institution?

### **Significance of the Study**

According to the United States Department of Education the enrollment of African American students in college is going to rise (23.8%) by 2020 (2,946,000 to 3,646,000) (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2011). This poses a challenge because Black college students in the United States continue to graduate at a lower rate than White college students (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2007). Nationwide the graduation rate for African American college students is 43% (Journal of Black in Higher Education, 2007). According to The Journal of Higher Education (2006) African American females are graduating at a much higher rate (47%) compared to African American males (36%).

At Midwestern University where this research took place there are several programs implemented through the Minority Affairs office that are geared towards





*Figure 1.* The enrollment of African American students at Midwest University over the past eight years has seen a consistent increase. Information obtained from Eastern Illinois University's Planning & Institutional Research website: <http://castle.eiu.edu/~planning/>

increasing retention amongst minority students. These programs provide students with academic and social support such as tutors, study hours, mentorship, and professional development workshops. These programs are in place because of the increased number of African American students entering Higher Education. Figure 1 shows the increase of African American students entering Midwest University over the past eight years.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Several limitations were identified. One limitation some may argue is inherent to the nature of qualitative research, researcher bias. Research bias is selective observation

and selective recording combined with the researcher's personal views and perspectives and directly impacts how the data is interpreted and how the research is conducted (Johnson & Christensen, 2010). Being an African American male who recently graduated from the institution I am familiar with the resources, environment, and identify with the perceived resources, persistence factors, and motivational factors of my participants. However, I did not spend all of my undergraduate experience at this institution; I transferred to the institution after my sophomore year and thus have a slightly different perspective. To avoid my own personal bias I had to first recognize them. Once recognizing my own biases it allowed me to be open to the participants as they shared their experiences and perspectives. Another limitation was finding participants to participate in the study that had graduated from the institution. An additional limitation was the willingness of participants to disclose personal information.

### **Definition of Terms**

**African American/Black Student.** A student with African ancestry. The term African American and Black are used interchangeably (Davenport, 2010).

**Attrition.** "The failure for students to reenroll at an institution in consecutive terms" (Moore, 2006, (p. 10).

**First Generation.** Parents of students that have no college experience (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005).

**Historically Black College or University (HBCU).** An institution of higher learning founded to educate the descendants of former slaves prior to 1964 (Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrand, 2001).

**Mentor.** Someone who proactively promotes the educational development of his or her protégé (Grant-Thompson & Atkinson, 1997).

**Motivation Factor.** People, groups, or organizations that initiate and sustain a student's enrollment at an institution of higher learning. Motivational factors can appear prior to a student's enrollment at an institution as well as while they are enrolled.

**Persistence.** A student's postsecondary education continuation behavior that leads to graduation (Arnold, 1999).

**Persistence Factor.** People, groups, or organizations that aid or support a student's remaining at an institution from one academic year to the next.

**Resources.** Programs or services implemented by the university to aid or support a student's progress from one academic year to the next.

**Retention.** Tracking of a full-time student in a degree program over time (6yrs/4yr college, 3yrs/2yr college) to determine whether the student has completed the intended program (National Center of Education Statistics, 2011). According to the National Center of Education Statistics (2011) retention or persistence is "the measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, expressed as a percentage. For four-year institutions, this is the percentage of first-time bachelors (or equivalent) degree-seeking undergraduates from the previous fall who are again enrolled in the current fall. For all other institutions this is the percentage of first-time degree/certificate-seeking students from the previous fall who either re-enrolled or successfully completed their program by the current fall" (retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/glossary/index.asp?id=772>).

**Content Summary**

Chapter I provided the reader with a detailed introduction to the present study. In this chapter the reader is exposed to, in great depth the overall purpose of the study. Chapter II exposes the reader to the review of literature regarding African American transition from historically Black colleges and universities to predominantly White institutions. The review of literature exposes the reader to past studies and findings on retention of African American students at both HBCUs and PWIs. Also, the review of literature contains findings of factors contributing to the academic success of African American students. Chapter III contains the methodology that was used in this qualitative study. Chapter IV contains the results from the qualitative study. Chapter V includes the discussion, implications, recommendations, and conclusion of the study.

## Chapter II

### **Review of Literature**

#### **History of Education for Blacks in the United States**

Having been prohibited from gaining even a basic education throughout their enslavement, many freed Black men and women expressed a strong desire to learn (Allen, 1992). However, the animosity exhibited by their former masters made it impossible for them to attend almost any level of preexisting schools. This initially fostered the need for Black colleges and universities. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were institutions of higher learning founded to educate the descendants of former slaves prior to 1964 (Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrand, 2001). The first HBCU was Cheyney University founded in 1837. There are 103 HBCUs in the United States today including public, private, and 2-year institutions (Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrand, 2001). In addition to the 103 HBCUs, there are approximately 50 predominately Black institutions. An institution is considered to be a predominately Black college or university when student enrollment is greater than 50% for Blacks (Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrand, 2001).

Until the 1960s, more than 90% of the African Americans enrolled in higher education in the United States were educated at HBCUs (Conrad & Kim, 2006). During the 1960's Black student enrollment at HBCUs began to decrease because of the pressure to desegregate the higher education system. By 1996 only 17% of Black students enrolled in college attended one of the 103 HBCUs in the country (Conrad & Kim, 2006). However, about 30% of the Bachelors of Arts degrees awarded to African-Americans annually are produced at a HBCU (Conrad & Kim, 2006).

**Black Students at PWIs**

For Black students attending Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), the experience of being a member of a minority group may present challenges to the development of a positive Black racial identity and ultimately their persistence toward graduation (Wilson & Constantine, 1999). It can be difficult for a Black student to adapt to the new environment at a PWI. Typically, students who successfully adapt establish social relationships with Whites, adjust to Black-White cultural differences, and cope with college academic requirements that are more demanding than those they faced in high school (Allen, 1992).

African American students attending PWIs cannot compare their experiences to their peers at HBCUs. Studies have shown that Black students at PWIs feel more alienated from their peers during their undergraduate experience (Furr & Elling, 2002). Constantine and Wilson (1999) stated “the challenges that Black students may encounter range from racial discrimination, lack of academic support, and social isolation” (p. 354). Students at PWIs may experience racial discrimination such as from peers, faculty, staff, and the surrounding community, racial discrimination and lack of academic support for Black students are occasionally intertwined at PWIs, which hinders Black students from being successful. Black students may not ask peers or faculty for assistance because of past racial discrimination or fear that racial discrimination may occur. Social isolation can also impact academic and personal success of Black students at a PWI with little or no social outlets for Black students to express themselves and interact with others from similar backgrounds problems can arise such as depression and a negative outlook of their environment and even their own self-concept (Wilson & Constantine).

The attrition rate of African American college students at PWIs has been substantially higher than that of White students (Guiffrida, 2003). Three factors that African American students face at PWIs that contribute to the rising attrition rate are unwelcoming campus climates, racial stereotypes, and faculty relationships (Love, 2008). The building of relationships amongst students plays a vital role in the adjustment to college life. According to Roberts and Styron (2010) two important factors that effects college students' persistence are social integration and building connections with others, especially with other students. In regards to campus climate African American students feel that they are disconnected from campus networks that are available to their White peers which lead to African American students viewing themselves as invisible or not part of the majority culture (Love, 2008). Racial stereotypes can foster an unsupportive learning environment for African American students at PWIs. African American students spend an abundance of time trying to combat racial stereotypes at the same time trying to establish credibility while at a PWI which may affect their intellectual functioning and performance (Love, 2008). Faculty also plays a major role in the attrition rate of African American students at PWIs. Studies show that student and faculty relationships are essential components to assisting African-American college students achieve success at PWIs (Love, 2008).

### **Persistence**

Although there have been significant increases in high school graduation rates of Black students, improvement still is needed in our college retention rates. For example, in 1999-2000, four-year college enrollment among Caucasians was 46%, for African Americans, 40%, and for Hispanics 34%. However, only 55% of all undergraduates who

began their studies at a given four-year institution in 1995-96 with the goal of a bachelor's degree completed that degree within six years at that same institution (including 59% of Caucasians and 41% of both African Americans and Hispanics) (Lowkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). Freshman class attrition rates are typically greater than any other academic year and are commonly as high as 20%-30% (DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004).

African American student retention on predominantly White campuses continues to be one of the greatest challenges for many colleges and universities (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2007). One mistake that PWIs make is not sufficiently meeting the needs of its Black students. According to Rowser (1997), students enter the university with rather well-defined self-perceptions of their academic preparation, personal and social needs and career aspiration. Black students must deal with the typical pressures of school and at the same time handle cultural biases and learn how to bridge his or her Black culture with the prevailing one at the PWI (Sedlacek, 1987).

One means of determining what students believe they need is through the use of student survey data (Rowser, 1997). Student needs assessments help professionals get a more accurate perspective of student's needs and this helps staff make programmatic decisions that will benefit the student (Rowser, 1997). Sedlacek (1987) identified eight non-cognitive variables that were critical in the lives of minority students including "positive self-concept or confidence, realistic self-appraisal, understands and deals with racism, demonstrated community service, prefers long term goals to short term goals, availability of strong support person, knowledge acquired in a field, and successful leadership experience" (p. 539). How students adjusted to these dimensions and how the



faculty and staff supported this adjustment would determine the success or failure of the minority student (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976).

### **First Generation Black College Students**

Ethnic minority first-generation college students are considered to be high risk students. Ethnic minority students when compared to White students have poorer academic performances and a higher dropout rate (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005). Unrealistic college expectations and lack of knowledge about how the university system works all contribute to the many problems first generation students face (Dennis, Phinney, & Chauteco, 2005). However, these minority students that come from low socioeconomic backgrounds utilize the opportunity of obtaining an education as a means to a better life and to avoid the hardships that their parents faced (Lopez, 2001).

Many first-generation African American men entering colleges and universities face limited resources and opportunities to aid in their career development and efforts to meet their career objectives (Owens, Lacey, Rawls, & Quince, 2010). Researchers have indicated that approximately 27% of all high school graduates in the United States are considered first-generation college students (Choy, 2001). African American students have been found to be less academically prepared for the rigor of college courses and have limited information about the college process in general (Thayer, 2000). Along with the instructional barriers that some of these students experience during their early academic years, many who continue on to college also encounter a conflict between the college environment and the cultures in which they were raised (Thayer, 2000). As a result, they lack a sense of belonging. This lack of belonging presents a challenge to

achievement of their scholastic goals and to their graduation (Owens, Lacey, Rawls, & Quince, 2010).

### **Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

**Perceived Factors.** The following factors were identified by the researcher as key factors that influenced what resources, motivational factors, and persistence factors African American students' used to successfully matriculate through college. Factors identified were mentoring, family support, involvement/social, faculty, and motivation.

**Mentoring.** A mentor is defined as someone who proactively promotes the educational development of his or her protégé (Grant-Thompson & Atkinson, 1997). Mentor and mentee relationships are usually developed in two ways; appointment through formal programs or informally, occurs naturally with no assistance through any program (Campbell & Campbell, 1997). Formal mentoring relationships are usually planned and often implemented by the university or administrators and are usually targeted for minority students (Lee, 1999). According to Lee (1999), informal mentoring relationships develop with no assistance from external sources. If implemented properly mentoring of African American students at predominantly White institutions can help remediate some of the problems they will face.

Lee (1999) conducted a qualitative assessment of 120 African American students enrolled in the University Transition Program (UTP) at North Carolina State University (NCSU) to discover students' perspectives on their adjustment to the university and to discover their perspective on the value of having a faculty mentor. Students were interviewed in focus groups consisting of seven people at three separate times during their freshmen year. Students enrolled in the UTP are conditionally admitted to NCSU.

The program's goal was to promote the academic success of the students. She found that students preferred to have a faculty mentor and viewed the mentor as someone that they could rely on after their completion of the UTP. She also identified that African American students across all focus groups placed more importance on having a mentor in their career field rather than an African American mentor. These suggested that the quality of the mentoring relationship was more important to students than the race of the mentor. Lee offered several recommendations for future practice. The first recommendation was to ensure that both the mentor and mentee received benefits from the relationships by having the institution create developmental activities for both parties so that they are responsively involved. Secondly students should contribute to the relationship by being prepared when they are meeting with mentors and being thankful for the mentor's efforts. Lastly, Lee recommended that faculty create an atmosphere of trust for the mentoring relationship to succeed. Faculty members should give full attention to the student during their meetings and avoid appearance of neglect.

***Family Support.*** African American students who have family members that have attended college and obtained a degree have a higher chance of academic achievement (Stewart, 2006). However, a large proportion of first year African American students are first generation students (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). The parents of first generation college students are not able to provide their children with the knowledge of the college experience which may lead to many obstacles for their students (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005). When African American students have close connection with their family before entering college they experience less conflict when trying to establish new relationships at college (Sledge, 2012). Although, parents of first generation college

students have little knowledge of the college experience they can still play positive role in their child's college process. According to Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco (2005), parents of first generation students can instill the values of going to college, provide encouragement throughout their children college experience, and provide emotional support as well.

***Involvement/Social.*** The social component of a college student's life can have a great impact on their persistence. According to Roberts and Styron (2010) being socially integrated and connected to others is an important factor that affects persistence for college students. The interaction of a student with their peers is a vital component of making involvement in campus activities and student organizations meaningful. The failure to become involved and engaged in organizations and activities on campus can lead to higher chances of attrition (Roberts & Styron, 2010).

Guiffreda (2004) conducted a qualitative study consisting of 88 African American students at a midsize institution located in the northeastern United States. The purpose of the Guiffreda's study was to understand the role of African American student organizations on their social integration at a predominantly White institution. Guiffreda included students in his sample that reported high involvement in organizations and those that reported little to no involvement to allow a wide range of perspectives to emerge. The interviews were conducted in focus groups of two to four students. Guiffreda found that the African American organizations that students discussed consisted of honor groups, Greek organizations, religious groups, political, and student government organizations. He found that students valued involvement in these African American organizations for several reasons. The first reason being it offered them a professional

connection. Students in the study reported that the organizations allowed them to make connections with African American faculty and build relationships that they would not have had the opportunity to do if not for the organization. Additionally, students valued their involvement in these organizations because it served as a way for them to give back. Students mentioned it was a way they could give back and help support other African American students on campus. The third and most emphasized reason students valued involvement in African American organizations was the “comfort” it gave them. Guiffrida stated that most of the students came to the predominantly White institution because they wanted to be in a diverse atmosphere. However, being the only Black student in most of their classes, places of employment, and on their residence hall floors, caused them to feel overwhelmed. The students stated that involvement in African American organizations allowed them to associate with people that look like them which led to a sense of comfort.

***Faculty.*** According to Lunberg (2010) the relationship between faculty and student is crucial in promoting student learning. Lunberg conducted a quantitative study consisting of 3,332 students representing several minority groups. The minority groups included African Americans, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Mexican American, Native American, other Hispanic groups, Puerto Rican, and multiethnic students. The purpose of Lunberg’s study was to determine how student involvement in the college experience and the institutions emphasis on valuing diversity contributed to learning. Lunberg (2010) found that “students’ perception of faculty were approachable, helpful, understanding, and encouraging predicted learning in general education and the development of intellectual skills” (p. 61). She concluded that minority students learn

more at institutions where faculty and administrators are commitment to understanding and appreciating human diversity

African American students in many cases find it difficult to establish a relationship or even approach a faculty member of a race other than their own because of the fear that those faculty members might have negative perceptions of the racial group that they identify with (Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr (2000), conducted a study consisting of 578 undergraduates (African American, Asian American, Latinos/as, and White). The purpose of the study was to determine students' perceptions of a campus cultural climate. The study identified that differences exist in regards to perception and experience of the campus cultural climate. Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr (2000), found that compared to Latino/a and Asian Pacific students African American students perceived a more negative climate on campus and a more negative relationship with faculty.

According to Kuh and Hu (2001) despite that reluctance to establish relationships with faculty outside of their race, interaction with those faculty members is still a strong predictor of student learning for all students. Faculty interactions with students impact student learning outcomes for many reasons. Student interactions with faculty can lead to faculty members encouraging students to become more engaged in academic areas of campus life (Twale & Sanders, 1999). Through interactions faculty members can promote students to think critically and thoroughly (Light, 2001). Also, through interactions faculty members can communicate to students that they have the ability to succeed and push students to set and reach high expectations (Tauber, 1997).

**Motivation.** A key factor in understanding students' academic persistence and performance is motivation (Robbins, Lauver, Le, Davis, Langley, & Carlstrom, 2004). The motivation that students have in regards to attending college is influenced by their cultural values (Phinney, Dennis, & Osorio, 2006). According to Dennis, Phinney, Chuateco (2005):

The motivation to attend college can be related to both individual and collective concerns. Individual motivations are based on personal interest, intellectual curiosity, and the desire to attain a rewarding career. Collectivist motivations include going to college in order to meet the expectations of the family. (pp. 324-325)

However, according to Hwang, Echols, and Vrongistinos (2002) African American students use a multidimensional approach when it comes to motivation rather than solely depending on internal or external motivation alone. Griffin (2006) conducted a study consisting of nine students at predominantly White institution located on the east coast. The purpose of Griffin's study was to understand what factors encouraged high achieving Black student to succeed and to understand how their motivation impacted their academic achievement. One key factor that Griffin found was self-motivation. Self-motivation for these high achieving students was multidimensional. Griffin found that while the students were highly internally driven, that same drive was coupled with an external motivational factor such as making their family proud or positively representing the Black community.

### **Summary of Literature**

The current literature reviewed African American college students' transition from historically Black colleges and universities to predominantly White institutions.

The present literature provides the findings of past studies on retention of African American students at both HBCUs and PWIs. Current literature shows that mentoring is a key factor in the academic success of African American college students. However, the number of African American faculty and staff is few at predominantly White institutions. The finding of current literature shows that the support of the family is a key factor in the academic success of African American students.

Findings from current literature also show that a majority of African American students that attend college at predominantly White institutions are first generation college students. These first generation college student parents have little to no knowledge of the college experience. When comparing first generation students to non-first generation students studies show that non-first generation student have more academic success.

The literature shows that student involvement in organizations on campus is a key factor contributing to persistence of students. Studies suggest that the lack of social involvement in organizations or other campus activities can lead to attrition. Findings from current literature reveals that African American students find it difficult to form relations with White faculty members. Past studies show that positive interactions between faculty and students can promote student learning leading to academic success. Lastly, the current literature reveals that a key factor in understanding a students' academic persistence is motivation. Student motivation can be internal, external, or both.



## Chapter III

### Methods

#### Design of the Study

This study examined factors African American students see as influential to their matriculation from year to year at a PWI located in the Midwest. Previous studies have shown that African American college students are graduating at a much lower rate than their White counterparts and retention rates of African Americans at PWIs across the nation remain a problem (Guiffreda, 2003; Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2007). Strauss and Corbin (1990) stated that qualitative research is used by researchers to “study organizations, groups, and individuals” (p.19). Qualitative research allows the researcher to analyze and understand what lies behind any phenomenon where little or nothing is known about the topic (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This approach allowed the researcher to examine persistence factors that African American students personally identified.

#### Participants

The participants in this study were six African American seniors or recent graduates of a mid-sized, four-year university in the rural Midwest. The information used to contact participants was obtained through the Office of Minority Affairs. The participants were selected using the purposeful sampling method and contacted through email (Appendix A). Purposeful selection of participants if done properly will produce a good representation of the entire population because it eliminates systematic and sampling bias (Creswell, 1998). Using the purposeful sampling method participants obtained were an equal number of male and females from a population that is dominated by females (63%). All participants except for one at some point in their time at the

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Sex	Age	First Generation	Senior/Graduate Student
Participant 1	Female	21	Yes	Senior
Participant 2	Male	21	Yes	Senior
Participant 3	Female	22	No	Graduate Student
Participant 4	Male	25	Yes	Graduate Student
Participant 5	Female	21	Yes	Senior
Participant 6	Male	23	Yes	Graduate Student

institution were members of the Black Student Union (BSU). All participants had completed at least 90 credit hours and were enrolled at the institution for at least 3 years. Participants were required to complete a consent form as required by the institutional research board (Appendix B). Individuals were informed that they may remove themselves from the study at any point without any question.

Participant 1 is a 21-year-old female senior at a Midwest university. She was double majoring in English and African American Studies. Participant 1 is a first generation student and attends college with her husband. She experienced various living environments throughout her life. At the age of 7 she lived in a large urban city in which, her neighborhood was comprised of mostly African Americans. At the age of 8 she and her family moved to the suburbs right outside of the urban city where she lived previously. At this particular time this suburban area was comprised of mostly Whites but, several years later it had become much more diverse with a much larger African American population. Her family eventually moved back to the urban city and again a predominantly African American neighborhood and diverse high school. Participant 1 attended three different high schools with the first being comprised mostly of Latino students, the second school she attended in the suburbs was comprised of mostly White

students and the one she graduated from was comprised of mostly African Americans. Participant 1 initially wanted to attend a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) which was her first option, however due to finances she made the selection to attend her current institution. Her decision to attend Midwest University was heavily dependent on the low cost and the similar demographics the university shared with one of the high schools she attended.

Participant 2 is a 21-year-old male and is currently in his senior year. He is a Theatre major and has a minor in English. Participant 2 is a first generation student and attending college with his wife. He comes from a two parent home and had two siblings that attended college prior to his enrollment. Participant 2 grew up in a suburban area comprised of low and lower middle class families. The neighborhood in which he grew up was very diverse including African Americans, Latinos, and Whites. The high school that Participant 2 attended and graduated from was comprised of mostly African Americans. However, most of his teachers at his high school were White. Participant 2 decided to come to Midwest University mainly because of financial reasons. His first choice was to go to a performance arts school but because of cost selected the current institution. Another reason he choose to attend this university was because of its proximity to home.

Participant 3 is a 22-year-old female graduate student and recent graduate. Her undergraduate major was Family and Consumer Sciences with a minor in Business Administration. She had just started her graduate studies in the Gerontology program at the same Midwest University she attended for undergraduate school. Participant 3 is not a first generation college student. She grew up in a suburban area. Her neighborhood

had very little diversity and was comprised of mostly Whites. The high school that Participant 3 attended was much like her neighborhood comprised of mostly Whites with little diversity. The only reason Participant 3 choose to come to Midwest University was because of her friend's decision to also attend the institution.

Participant 4 is a 25-year-old male graduate student and recent graduate. He is a first generation student who is currently attending graduate school at the same university. He comes from a single parent home and grew up in an urban area. His neighborhood was comprised of mostly African Americans. Similar to his neighborhood, his high school also was comprised of mostly African American students and teachers. Priority at his school revolved around athletics instead of academics. Participant 4 decided to come to this Midwest University because it was cost efficient. However, the Midwest University was his last choice because it was so close to home and he wanted to attend school far away from home.

Participant 5 is a 21-year-old female in her senior year. Her major is Family and Consumer Sciences and she is a first generation college student. She resided in a predominantly African American urban area until the age of nine. However, after her parents split up she moved to a suburban area that was predominately White. Overall Participant 5 expressed having had a diverse high school experience. When she started high school it was comprised of mostly White students but, by the time she graduated more African Americans than Whites attended the school. Participant 5 decided to attend this Midwest University because her parents could afford it. However, Midwest University was actually her second choice.

Participant 6 is a 23-year-old male graduate of Midwest University. His undergraduate major was Public Relations with a minor in Business Administration, and he is currently in graduate school studying Sports Administration at the same Midwest University. Participant 6 is a first generation student. He grew up in a two parent home, in an urban area where he moved around several times during his childhood. He stayed in a predominantly African American neighborhood in his early years of childhood and moved to a more diverse neighborhood soon after. Participant 6 attended a high school that was comprised of mostly White students. He choose to attend this Midwest university because it was affordable and because of its location in regards to distance from home.

### **Location**

The site for this study was a mid-sized (11,630 students) university located in the rural Midwest. The population of the city is approximately 21,000 including the students attending the university. The student-to-faculty ratio is 20:1. As of fall 2011 Midwest University enrolled over 1,300 African American students with over 36% of this population being males and 63% being females. Interviews were held in a private study room in the library on the campus.

### **Instrument**

**Researcher Reflection.** In a qualitative study recognizing that the researcher is an instrument of the research is an important factor (Maxwell, 2013). According to Maxwell “separating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from a major source of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks” (p. 45). Being an African American male who attended Midwest University for majority of my undergraduate

career as well as for graduate school I have my own perceived beliefs about what factors and resources help influence African American students through to graduation. While attending Midwest University I established positive relationships with faculty members, administrators, departments, and offices across campus. I also, experienced negative interactions with some of the same agents. As a first generation college student I relied on support from family and friends to help me get through many challenges. At various times I felt that the university provided me with resources that enabled me to be successful. However, I think Midwest University could do a much better job of making resources available to students. During my time at Midwest University I saw a lot of African American students fail academically because they lacked the support needed to succeed. The reason for conducting this study was to provide the institution with information that students who successfully matriculated through the university perceived as helpful. The university could use the information provided to better address the needs of African American students.

**Semi-Structured Interview.** The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with six participants. Each interview was semi-structured incorporating a core group of questions (Appendix C) to answer each research question but also allowing room to explore other topics (Mason, 2002). The researcher developed these questions to get student's personal perspectives regarding factors that impacted their decision to remain at the institution in order to answer the determined research questions. All interviews were conducted in a private room located in the library of Midwest University. Each 30 minute interview was audio and video recorded and then transcribed by the researcher within two weeks.

## **Data Collection**

The interview questions developed were designed to answer the research questions. When developing these questions the researcher took several components into account such as; are these open ended questions, do the questions allow for rapport building and the development of trust between the researcher and the participant, and finally do the questions help answer the established research questions (Kvale 1996). The interview questions (Appendix C) began by asking the participant to share background information to better understand their pre-college life experiences and establish rapport with the participant. Questions about college selection were also included. Next, questions about student experiences, interactions with others, use of resources, etc. were asked by specific academic year.

The participants were video recorded to add a visual dimension that is not available through audio recording. Kvale (1996) stated “with the inclusion of facial expressions and bodily posture, a videotape provides richer contexts for interpretations than does audiotape” (p. 161). The interviews took place in a private room located in the library. Only the researcher and the participant were present at the interview. The recordings were saved to a memory card. A transcription of the video was conducted.

## **Data Analysis**

The audio and video recording of the interview were only reviewed by the researcher. The researcher transcribed the recordings to text. Following the transcribing process the researcher coded the transcription using line-by-line analysis. Line-by-line analysis is important because those categories created through this method of coding became the basis of the researchers theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) define categorizing as “the process of grouping concepts that seem to pertain to the same phenomena” (p. 65). Also, two other researchers reviewed the transcripts and developed categories independently. Reviewers received a hard copy of the transcriptions that was returned to the researcher. After the categories were created the researcher emailed the transcripts to each participant and asked the participants to review the transcripts and categories created to validate the accuracy (Creswell, 1998).

### **Treatment of Data**

The participants in the study were assigned numbers to hide their identity. Consent forms, transcriptions from interviews, and other documents that could reveal participants identities were either locked away in a file cabinet or maintained on a password protected computer located in the researcher’s home that only the researcher had access to. All data will be kept for the time frame of four years in which after that time frame will be destroyed.



## Chapter IV

### Results

#### Introduction

This chapter is comprised of the results from the interviews of six African American students who have been motivated by various entities, persisted through various challenges, and supported by various resources through their collegiate career at a predominantly White institution located in the Midwest. Two of the students are recent graduates of the university and four are currently in their senior year at the institution. All the participants brought a unique perspective to the study. Each participant was willing and eager to participate in the study and to provide key factors that helped them matriculate through their collegiate years. Four research questions guided the present study.

1. What motivates African American students to stay at the institution?
2. What persistence factors influence African American students through to graduation?
3. What resources do African American students identify as helping them successfully graduate from the institution?

#### Challenges

All the participants in this study faced a variety of challenges that occurred at various times over their collegiate career. For Black students attending PWIs, the experience of being a member of a minority group may present challenges to the development of a positive Black racial identity and ultimately their persistence toward graduation (Wilson & Constantine, 1999). These challenges included: being a first

generation student, lack of parental support, unpreparedness for college course work, racism on campus, feeling like one does not belong, unable to connect with professors, declaring a major, socializing with peers, focusing on school work, knowledge of resources available, and self-motivation.

**RQ1: What motivates African American students to stay at the institution?**

There are several factors that motivate and encourage students to continue their education. Motivational factors occurred during the students' collegiate career as well as prior to their enrollment at Midwest University. All the participants in the study shared similarities when it came to motivational factors that helped them stay at the university. Questions were designed to get the participants to think about motivational factors that influenced them as students and even before enrolling at the university. Several participants identified motivational factors that occurred prior to enrolling in college that continued to be a huge impact throughout their college experience. Though the participants share similar motivational factors each participant's journey was different. After conducting one-on-one interviews with each participant several categories and themes surfaced. Those categories were family; friends; offices; university personnel motivators; faculty; internal motivators; and internal university motivators.

**Family.** All the participants in the study identified family as being one of their motivating factors contributing to their success in college. Each participant, through their interview, made it known that without the support of their family their educational journey would have been much harder. The family motivation that the participants received came from different members of the family, and for different reasons. Two of the participants were married and received much of their motivation from their spouse.

Three of the participants grew up in single parent households and also acknowledged the support of grandparents. One participant viewed his brother and sister as being motivational factors. No matter which member of the family provided the motivation it was still crucial in their college success. Participant 4 stated:

Family is the biggest thing that motivated me. Like I said they look up to me, I'm the second oldest male in my whole family. They look up to me every time I come home. I'm up here I'm not down there, I can't really help them like I want to so the best way I can help them is to show them by graduating from college and getting an undergraduate degree and now pursuing my master's to let them know that there is bigger and better things than just what's back at home.

Participant 6 was also heavily motivated by his family stating "what motivated me was definitely my family, I'm a first generation college student and I just felt like this is where I was supposed to be."

***Parent Motivators.*** Five out of the six student participants identified themselves as being a first generation college student. However, three of the five participants that identified themselves as being a first generation college student had a parent that attended college but did not obtain a degree. Three of the six participants stated that their parents played a pivotal part of the students' educational experience. Participant 5 stated:

I talked to my mom a lot when I couldn't figure out what I wanted to do with my major she was really supportive as far as getting me like those U.S. Bureau outlook books for the different jobs and what not. Actually doing the research herself on major, classes that I needed to take, and helping me when I really didn't know where to go.

Another participant talked about how important just having talks with her grandmother were when she felt like giving up “I think my motivation was of course family, they definitely were always there telling me that I can do it, especially my grandmother.”

***Sibling Motivators.*** Participant 2 is the youngest of four children, and saw himself as having a lot to live up to with prior family achievements because all of his siblings have gone to college and two had received degrees. Participant 2 stated “out of everyone, I would have to say my brother has always been my motivation.” Participant 2’s brother had attended college but dropped out and yet continues to push him to finish his degree. Participant 2 recalls his brother saying to him “I couldn’t do it, but I know you can.” Participant 2 uses those words as motivation whenever he faces a challenge. Also, seeing how his brother didn’t give up after dropping out of college and actually found a job that pays more than most individuals with degrees earn was an inspiration for him.

***Spouse Motivators.*** Participant 1 and Participant 2 both are married and unlike the other participants received motivation from their spouse. “Marrying someone that has the same drive to be successful as you if not more, is motivation alone” stated Participant 2. The marriage between Participant 2 and his wife motivated him even more to obtain a degree. Participant 2 stated “once me and my wife got married I knew that I didn’t have a choice but to earn my degree.” Participant 1 stated the same as Participant 2 in many ways. However, her spouse motivated her more on an emotional basis. Participant 1 stated:

He was there when I needed someone to talk to about my day. Good or bad he would listen. He always told me that I would be okay and we would get through this together.

**Friends.** Three participants stated friends as being motivational factors that helped them matriculate through their college career. Participant 1 was motivated by her friends along with her husband. Participant 1 stated:

I have a solid group of friends that I can really call friends who are interested in the same things that I'm interested in. We can sit we can talk about it and kind of discuss the issues we had.

Participant 1 mentioned without her solid group of friends she would have suffered socially and in some cases academically. Participant 1 stated “they motivated me to study when I wanted to do other things. They kept me focused on the big picture. I don’t know if I would be where I am today academically without them.” Participant 4 also credits his friends with helping him successfully complete his undergraduate degree after being dismissed from the university twice. In regards to his friends he stated:

Yeah, they really motivated me. We stayed on top of each other for the most part. A bunch of us got kicked out at different times and when I got kicked out they gave me some words of encouragement and told me to come back and go ahead and finish my degree. When they got kicked out I was there to help them. So, having good close friends that are real and will keep it one hundred percent with you is the best thing to help you get through college in my opinion.

**Offices.** During the interviews only one participant gave reference to an office/department serving as a motivational factor to them. You could tell by the

excitement in Participant 2's voice when he mentioned this department with which he had developed a good relationship. Participant 2 a theatre major in the Theater Arts department talked about all the plays the department was going to conduct in the near future and how they were incorporating African American writers into their future performances. Participant 2 stated:

They're doing things they've never done before but now they are going to do a play by Amiri Baraka called Dutchman. Two plays actually, I forgot what the second play is called but one play that they're doing is called Dutchman. It's a powerful piece. I look back at their history of shows and they've never done a show like this, they have never done anything geared towards black people so I think that's a step in the right direction.

**University Personnel.** Three of the participants were able to start a meaningful relationship with several of their professors. Participant 1 however, found the process of connecting with her Black professors more natural than connecting with her White professors. She stated "it tends to be easy to form a relationship with my Black professors." Participant 4 on the other hand had made meaningful connections with several of his White professors and they really motivated him to graduate and attend graduate school. Participant 4 recalls having one of his first conversations with one of his professors. "You know he opened my eyes to some things as far as being a Black male and how we should try to change statistics as far as us being in jail and stuff." When asked to go into more details about how one of his professors motivated him he stated:

He actually motivated me my sophomore going into junior and sophomore year, he pretty much told me like 'dude, get it together, you have so much potential and you're not putting forth the effort.

Participant 4 used that advice as motivation and worked even harder to live up to his potential. Participant 4 stated "he actually saw what I didn't see in myself as well and he pushed me to become a better person."

**Internal.** During the interviews the participants reflected on times when they motivated themselves to continue their college education. Motivational factors such as self-motivation, fear of failure, and visualizing receiving their degree motivated them through tough times.

**Self-Motivation.** All six participants shared times when they motivated themselves to continue their journey toward graduation. Each participant had several outside influences that motivated them at some point but it was clear in each of their interviews they wanted to graduate and receive a degree for themselves as well. Participant 5 not only used self-motivation to work towards receiving a degree but to better her-self as well. She stated "I believe that learning is really important to me being a productive adult so I take it pretty seriously."

**Degree Attainment.** Visualizing and telling oneself that they would, by any means, achieve their goal of obtaining a degree was motivation for two of the participants. Participant 1 motivated herself on several occasions by consistently telling herself "I want a degree." That statement alone motivated her to strive and push herself when she felt like giving up. To keep herself motivated Participant 5 said:

I kept visioning myself walking across that stage, like that's all I could think about like even if something is difficult now, when that time comes I want to be in my cap and gown and I'm going to have my degree.

***Fear of Failure.*** Two of the six participants made comments regarding the fear of failing. Participant 4 during his interview would reference his family mentioning on several occasions that he is the oldest and only male to attend college from his family. Not only did he have the pressure of succeeding for himself but for his family as well. The fear of letting his family down motivated him to fight through hard times. Participant 5 mentioned a time when she first got to Midwest University and people were telling her most Black students don't last many semesters and often drop out. Participant 5 used that negative notion as motivation and she stated "I just didn't want to be one of those many people that didn't make it. I didn't want to be a statistic."

***The University.*** Throughout the interview the participants made comments about how the Midwest University itself motivated them to continue to work towards their degree. Internal factors such as cost of attendance and campus atmosphere played a pivotal role in motivating the participants.

***Money as the Motive.*** Money was the motivating factor for five of the six participants attending the university. The Midwest University was not the first choice for Participant 4. Participant 4 viewed the low cost of attendance and the amount of financial aid awarded to him as "a free ride" and that ultimately is what motivated him to attend. Participant 1 viewed the low cost of attendance and the university closeness to home as one of the most important motivation factors for her. Participant 1 stated "it's



affordable like I said, it's not that far from home and I mean it's not a horrible environment."

***Welcoming Atmosphere.*** Three of the six participants in various ways stated in their interview that they felt like the atmosphere of the university motivated them to stay and obtain a degree. Participant 6 stated "I like the atmosphere, I feel like it was diverse. I was able to succeed so you know; I have nothing but respect and pride for my Midwest University." Likewise, Participant 6 stated:

Even though it's mostly White, I still feel comfortable, I feel like I'm as much a part of this university as the next person. Like I feel as much pride being here, I love the college that I'm at you know.

Participant 1 felt like the atmosphere of the college gives the students a chance to grow. She stated:

I feel like here you're able to kind of move up the ladder in a lot of ways. Like I kind of put my foot in a lot of different things and I'm really seeing the benefits of it coming into my senior year.

## **RQ2: What persistence factors influence African American students through to graduation?**

To understand what caused students to persist at Midwest University participants were asked to reflect on what factors influenced their completing college. All the participants in the study shared similarities related to persistence factors, those things that helped them get through challenges they faced at various times of their college experience. Though the participants share similar persistence factors each participant's journey toward graduation was different. After conducting one-on-one interviews with

each participant several categories and themes surfaced. Those categories were family persistence factors; friend persistence factors; organizational involvement persistence factors; university personnel persistence factors; internal university persistence factors; and internal persistence factors.

**Family.** All the participants discussed the influence of their family as persistence factors at some point during their college career. Three of the six participants directly talking about family members as being persistence factors during challenging times of their undergraduate experience.

***Parent Persistence Factors.*** During the interview with Participant 5 she talked about the challenge of finding a major to declare during her freshmen year. She persisted through the challenge of finding a major with the help of her mom:

I talked to my mom a lot when I couldn't figure out what I wanted to do with my major she was really supportive as far as like getting me like those U.S. Bureau outlook books for the different jobs and what not. Actually doing the research herself on major and classes that I needed to take.

Participant 2 also mentioned that on several occasions he found himself calling home to get support and encouragement from his parents stating "I would just get tired of being at school. Rather it was stress from school work or just getting irritated being here I could always call on them to help me get through whatever I was going through."

***Spouse Persistence Factors.*** While interviewing Participant 2 he talked about how his wife helped him persist through most of the challenges he faced during his undergraduate experience stating:

Well I came in with my wife so whatever problems she faced, I faced or whatever problems I faced she faced. Everything I go through we go through together. She was the first person I would talk to.

During the interview with Participant 1 she shared a challenge she had faced in dealing with a rude alumnus at a football game. Participant 1 perceived the alumnus statements towards her to be discriminatory. Participant 1 described this event as having a huge impact on her mentally stating “If not for my husband talking to me and helping me calm down my anger at the time, it would have probably affected my academics.”

**Friends.** Four participants identified friends as influencing their persistence toward matriculation through their college career. During Participants 1’s freshman year her biggest challenge was getting accustomed to the university. Participant 1 mentioned that in order to get acclimated to the university you have to know “how to separate yourself from communities but spread yourself to every community so that you do have a diverse background.” In regards to how she adjusted to the campus climate she responded:

I would have to say a solid group of friends that I can really call friends who are interested in the same things that I'm interested in. We can sit we can talk about it and kind of discuss the issues we had.

Much like participant 1, Participant 4 also had problems adjusting to the college life his freshmen year. Participant 4 stated “Everything was all on me, you know, so I had a problem with adjusting to that and I was pretty wild my freshmen year.” Participant 4 credits his group of friends that he met for setting him back on track at rough times. After being dismissed from the university twice and feeling like he was headed down the

same path again Participant 4 reached a point in his college career where he wanted to just give up and join the Marines. The course work along with providing for himself had become overwhelming. However, Participant 4 stated:

I got through it mainly with my friends that I met here. When I told them that I was going to join the Marines they called me up and gave me some words of encouragement and I don't mean any good words. They pretty much told me to bring my butt back up here and stop trying to settle for something quick and in the moment.

Those words of encouragement from his friends were the turning point for Participant 4:

Yeah they really motivated me. You know. We stayed on top of each other for the most part. A bunch of us got kicked out, you know, at different times and when I got kicked out they gave me some words of encouragement and told me to come back and go ahead and finish my degree. When they got kicked out, you know, I was there to help them. So, having good close friends that's real and will keep it one hundred with you is the best thing to help you get through college in my opinion.

Participant 3 coming from a predominantly White high school didn't really have a difficult time adjusting to the campus climate. However, participant 3 had a more difficult time adjusting to the freedom and also stated she felt unprepared for the work in her courses. In dealing with those academic difficulties she stated "I think I got through the challenges with having friends around I came with my best friend so she was there all through my four years."

Participant 5 said one of the first challenges she thought she would encounter would be finding friends. She admitted to being a shy person but wanted to make friends to make her transition to college a good one. The challenge of finding friends didn't last long because Participant 5 and her new roommate quickly became good friends. Participant 5 also stated that the friendships she formed her freshmen year got her through the most difficult times including selecting a major and creating good study habits.

**Organizational Involvement.** Three of the six participants discussed organizational involvement as being a persistent factor that helped them get through several challenges during their undergraduate experience. Participant 1 shared a challenge that she faced her junior year which was trying to get more things on campus to help build the Black culture around the institution. The main challenge that Participant 1 faced was not being able to find resources or get support from the university. Instead of just sitting around waiting for something to happen Participant 1 decided to run for president of NAACP and implement the change she wanted to see on campus.

One of Participant 5's challenges was getting over her fear of meeting new people so she could make new friends. To help get over this fear Participant 5 joined the Black Student Union at Midwest University. Not only did BSU provide her with the opportunity to meet new people it added to her professional development. Participant 5 stated:

I was on the PR and marketing committee, I felt like I had some type of importance, which I appreciated because it gave me something to do, it gave me something to put on my resume and it also helped me to become social.

Similar to Participant 5, Participant 6 faced the challenge of getting socially involved on campus once he arrived at Midwest University. When Participant 6 started at Midwest University he only knew two people attending the university. One of the individuals invited Participant 6 to attend a BSU meeting and from that day on he became actively involved. In regards to joining BSU participant 6 stated:

I was able to be social so I just started to get involved. I just started meeting people through that organization and that really just enhanced my network around campus. It also allowed me to be a little more confident. I started seeing people that I actually was getting to know and people started to kind of remember me and so I just kind of started feeling more at home.

As Participant 6 became more comfortable in his new environment he began to like BSU even more. He decided it was time for him to take on a bigger role in the organization.

Participant 6 stated:

It was a very good group, they were doing a lot of good things around campus. So, I figured since back in high school and in middle school I always liked being involved, I thought I would take advantage of a good opportunity.

After holding several positions on the BSU executive board Participant 6 decided to run for president and won. Participant said "it's something I'm proud of." Participant 6 was also involved in the TRiO program and utilized their services.

**University Personnel.** Three of the six participants identified various university personnel as being persistence factors. The university personnel identified were faculty members and a minority affairs administrator.

***Faculty as Persistence Factors.*** Two of the six participants were able to utilize their professors as persistence factors when they were facing challenges during their undergraduate experience. Participant 1 went through a time where she felt like she was not getting a lot out of her program. However, that all changed when the university hired a Black female professor that really inspired her to further her knowledge of her major and even consider it as a graduate program in her future. Participant 4 on the other hand had made meaningful connections with several of his White professors and they really pushed him to graduate and attend graduate school. Participant 4 recalled a time when he was slacking off in class and really wasn't paying any attention to one of his professors in class:

I wasn't paying him (professor) any attention and he gave me an F in the class, so the next go round he...I just pretty much stayed right there by his side and he pushed me. He didn't hold my hand and say come on we're going to do this, he actually pushed me and made me be successful.

Participant 3 faced the challenge of adjusting to the course load of college, and mentioned that on several occasions she felt underprepared by her high school.

Participant 3 persisted through this challenge with the help of her professors, stating:

Getting closer to my professors helped and they were very encouraging through the whole experience and always there if I had any questions or if I needed to talk on a personal level so that's really what got me through the challenges.

Participant 3's hard work paid off. She was in the honors college and also graduated with honors.

***Administrator Persistence Factors.*** Participant 1 utilized the TRiO office on Midwest University's campus. Participant 1 stated she received a lot of help and support from the Director of TRiO throughout her college career helping her with various challenges. Participant 1 stated "That's like the number one person (Director of TRiO) to go to if I have any issues, she'll definitely help me out."

***Internal University.*** Two of the six participants mentioned times when they persisted through several challenges they faced from within the university. Throughout the interview the participants made comments about how the Midwest University itself helped in pushing them to continue to work towards their degree.

***Making Faculty Aware of my Presence.*** Like most African American students that attend Midwest University Participant 1 was the only Black student in the majority of his classes. Participant 1 made it a priority not to fall to the back of the class stating, "I make it a priority to make them aware that I'm a part of the class and not just another face to them." Participant 1 believed that by speaking up in class and making his professors aware of his presence got him through the challenge of feeling left out or alone which he stated some of his friends experienced.

Participant 6 mentioned in his interview how the small class sizes that Midwest University offered gave him the opportunity to connect with professors on a personal level. Participant 6 stated "I was able to make some positive bonds with some faculty around the campus." Participant 6 mentioned that these bonds that he was able to create with some of his professors made him feel like he belonged. He felt that he wasn't judged by the color of his skin but by the quality of his work.



**Internal.** Two of the six participants mentioned times when they persisted through several challenges they faced from within. Persistence factors such as self-motivation, fear of failure, and visualizing receiving their degree motivated them through challenges they faced.

**Self-Motivation.** Like all of the participants in this study Participant 5 was asked to weigh how seriously she takes her academics compared to her White counter parts. Participant 5 said “they might take their grades a little bit more seriously than me at some points but I don't really think it's too different but I just think its way more important to me, like I can't stop.” Participant 5 also talked about how she felt like she was a part of the university even though she does not see many people like herself in most of her classes. Participant 5 stated:

Even though it's mostly white, I still feel comfortable, I feel like I'm as much a part of this university as the next person. There just happens to be more of one type of person here and it really motivates me as an African American student to do better. I feel as much pride being here, I love the college that I'm at.

**Degree Attainment.** Visualizing and telling oneself that they would, by any means, achieve their goal of obtaining a degree was a very important persistence factor for Participant 4. While Participant 4 was dismissed for academic reasons twice, he worked hard and was readmitted and turned things around and faced less challenges his final two years at the institution. Participant 4 said “my junior and senior year, I didn't really face to many challenges because at that time I knew it was crunch time and it was time for me to hurry up and graduate and get a degree.”

**RQ3: What resources do African American students identify as helping them successfully graduate from the institution?**

Resources are factors implemented by the university to assist students in progressing from one year to the next. Several of the participants in the study shared similarities when it came to resources that helped them get through challenges they faced at various times of their college experience. The purpose for asking specific questions the resources students use was to gear the participants to think about those resources that they relied on while enrolled at Midwest University. Though the participants share similar resources that helped them, each participant's journey was different. After conducting one-on-one interviews with each participant several categories and themes surfaced. Those categories were offices, organizational involvement, and university personnel.

**Offices.** Five of the six participants identified offices on campus as resources for them at different points of their college career. Participant 2, Participant 4, and Participant 5 identified the Office of Minority Affairs, TRiO (program under Minority Affairs), and New Student Programs as offices serving as a resource to them. When asked about offices that have provided support for her Participant 1 said:

I do know that I could go to someone in a couple different offices on campus in New Student Programs, Office of Minority Affairs, and TRiO. As far as showing minorities or even just African American students what the campus has to offer I think that the Office of Minority Affairs does a good job of trying to provide that but its only so much one department can do verses an entire university.

Participant 2 identified the Theater Department as being a valuable resource for him. He remembers starting as a theater major and not many of the plays or books they read pertained to Blacks. However, over the years he feels the department has begun to diversify its program by doing more diverse plays which he identified as a way they are supporting him. Participant 2 with excitement on his face stated “I’m finishing up my last requirements and what they’re actually doing is in February, Black History Month, a play by Amiri Baraka called Dutchman.” Participant 2 said he has really seen a positive change in the department. The positive changes in his department has opened up his eyes to numerous opportunities and has him excited about pursuing his masters in Theater Arts.

Participant 4 when facing some of his hardest times at the institution was able to rely on a couple of offices for support. The two offices were the Student Success Center and the TRiO program. Participant 4 said they provided him with study tips and skills that would make him a more productive student. Participant 6 credited the Business Department which is his major, financial aid services, and Career Services with supporting him through his undergraduate experience. Participant 6 stated that the Business department was very good at getting information out about various issues to students. Also, he felt that Career Services at many times went beyond to help assist him. Participant 6 further shared:

Career Services did a good job of reaching out just letting us know about different scholarships. They are good about emailing you about different scholarships that are involved in your major definitely so that definitely helped out.

In regards to financial aid issues Participant 6 stated that the Financial Aid Office was very helpful. He mentioned that on several occasions they were able to inform him about scholarships that he eventually received after applying.

**Organizational Involvement.** All six participants mentioned being involved in the Black Student Union (BSU) at some point during their educational career. Participant 5 and Participant 6 actually became heavily involved within BSU. Participant 5 wanted to see change in the organization on the campus and thus became a part of the Public Relations Committee and the Marketing Committee. Participant 6 credits BSU with helping her develop her resume, the opportunity to be active on campus, and helping develop her social skills. Participant 6 was also heavily involved with BSU. After attending several meetings his first year at Midwest University he decided he wanted to see certain changes within BSU and on the campus. Participant 6 ran for President of BSU the following year and won. Participant 6 also, credits BSU with helping him develop both professional and leadership skills. Participant 2 also mentioned he has been provided with a lot of support from the S.T.R.O.N.G. MENToring program. S.T.R.O.N.G. is a mentoring program on campus designed towards supporting underrepresented males on campus. When asked about what organization or support service that has really helped him through his college career Participant 2 stated:

S.T.R.O.N.G MENToring program. I guess seeing other black guys, who, some of them are from areas that resemble where I'm from. Some of them have the same goals as me; they got the same mindset that I have. They take the same classes that I have and have the same teachers that I have. And plus with them being young Black guys who haven't come together to socialize and we haven't come

together to you know to throw a party or we are not trying to come together so we can fight somebody. We're coming together to just genuinely talk about things that's affecting us every day.

That's something that I've found with S.T.R.O.N.G, that's a program that I began to utilize more within these last couple semesters really as an outlet.

**University Personnel.** All participants identified various university personnel as being resources. The university personnel identified were faculty members, advisors, and minority affairs administrators.

***Faculty as Resources.*** Five of the six participants mentioned faculty as being a resource that helped them matriculate through their undergraduate years. Participant 1 mentioned that she has formed a positive relationship with both her White and Black professors. However, Participant 1 said "It tends to be easy to form a relationship with my black professors. I have positive relationships with some of my white professors too but it's more because I put forth the effort." Participant 1 went on to share that one of her professors really inspired her to continue her education and attend graduate school.

Participant 3 mentioned throughout her undergraduate experience and especially in her major class her professors were always there to help in any way they could. When asked about how her professors served as a resource for her Participant 3 stated "as far as my professors just being in classes and knowing that they were always offering up themselves." Participant 3 also mentioned that her professors always made it clear to her and her classmates if they need any additional help or information outside of the classroom to just ask.

Participant 5 also mentioned that she was able to successfully develop relationships with some of her professors. Participant 5 stated “I enjoy being in their presence. I enjoyed being in their classes and enjoying their knowledge.” Participant 4 mentioned that without the help of his major professors pushing him to work hard and holding him accountable for his work he felt he wouldn’t have graduated. In regards to one of his professors Participant 4 said “he actually saw what I didn’t see in myself as well and he pushed me to become a better person, you know.” Participant 6 also stated that he developed positive relationships with his professors.

***Administrators as Resources.*** Four of the six participants mentioned utilizing several administrators around campus as resources. Participant 2 mentioned the Director of Minority Affairs as being a person he viewed as a positive role model from the first day he stepped on campus. Participant 2 stated “she reminded me of my mother. She reminded me of my mom and I think that’s what kind of made me feel okay, kind of made me feel more comfortable with Midwest University as an environment.” Participant 1 mentioned the Director of TRiO as being a person she could go to whenever she was faced with a challenge. Participant 1 stated “that’s like the number one person (Director of TRiO) to go to if I have any issues, she’ll definitely help me out.” Participant 4 and Participant 5 mentioned their advisors at different points of their college careers serving as valuable resource to them helping them choose classes that would be beneficial to them.

### **Summary of Results**

There are several reasons why students continue their education. This study was designed to further understand what those motivational factors were that were influencing

student persistence. Additionally, understanding what resources African American students utilize and identify as helping them through their time in college was studied. Through the use of qualitative inquiry it was determined that participants motivation came from various places, like family, friends, university offices, faculty, and internally. While each participant identified a slightly different set of motivational factors, there were common themes between participants. An interesting find was that participants when asked about persistence identified factors that were similar to motivation. Finally, when identifying resources utilized by these undergraduate students, it is interesting to note that students identified their involvement and interaction with specific offices and student organizations as being influential. Motivation, persistence, and resources are each connected to one another and as students identified factors in each area it was evident that together they all influence the overall success, which is completing their undergraduate degree, in significant ways.

## Chapter V

### **Discussion, Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusion**

#### **Discussion**

This qualitative study was conducted to explore the various reasons why African American students succeeded at a predominantly White institution. The study examined resources, persistence factors, and motivational factors that helped African American students matriculate through the four year university. The experiences of the participants in this study shed light on key factors that led to their matriculation from freshmen to senior year.

African American students use a multidimensional approach when it comes to motivation rather than solely depending on internal or external motivation alone (Hwang, Echols, & Vrongistinos, 2002). The findings of this study support this notion, revealing that all six participants relied on internal and external motivational factors at various points. The study found that there are several factors that motivated and encourage students to continue their education. Motivational factors occurred during the students' collegiate career as well as prior to their enrollment at Midwest University. All the participants in the study shared similarities when it came to motivational factors that helped them stay at the university. Several participants identified motivational factors that occurred prior to enrolling in college but still had a huge impact throughout their college experience. Though the participants share similar motivational factors each participant's journey was different. After conducting one-on-one interviews with each participant several categories and themes surfaced. The findings of this study support Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco's (2005) findings that the collective and individual



concern of each student determines what motivational factors emerge. Those categories were family, friends, specific offices, university personnel motivators, faculty, internal motivators, and internal university motivators.

The findings of this study also revealed that African American students face a variety of challenges on a predominantly White campus. To understand how one persists you must take into account the mental state of the student before he or she arrives on campus along with the climate and dynamics of the campus. Rowser (1997) concluded that Black students first enroll in college with well-defined perceptions of their academic preparation, personal and social needs, as well as their career aspirations. Also, Sedlacek (1987) states Black students must deal with the typical pressures of school and at the same time handle cultural biases and learn how to bridge their black culture with the prevailing one on campus. The data collected supports both Rowser's and Sedlacek's claims. Several students in this study entered the university with a clear notion of their personal goals. However, those same students encountered cultural bias both in and outside of the classroom that interfered with their pursuit of academic success. All the participants in the study shared similarities related to persistence factors, those things that helped them get through challenges they faced at various times of their college experience. Though the participants share similar persistence factors each participant's journey toward graduation was different. After conducting one-on-one interviews with each participant several categories and similarities or factors that influenced persistence were determined. Those included family and friend influence, organizational involvement, university personnel, and internal persistence factors.

Findings of this study revealed that intentional resources at a predominantly White institution can positively impact African American students' academic outcome. Resources are intentional tools and support implemented by the university to assist students in progressing from one year to the next. According to Rowser (1997) one mistake that predominantly white institutions make is not efficiently addressing the needs of its Black students. Several of the participants in the study shared similarities when it came to the utilization of resources that helped them get through challenges they faced at various times during their college experience. This study showed that the participants' utilized similar resources that helped them matriculate through college. However, each participant journey was somewhat different. The one-on-one interviews with each of the participants rendered several categories and themes. Those categories were offices, organizational involvement, and university personnel.

During crisis situations that may emerge, African American students need to have a strong support system, someone that they can turn to for help (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985). The findings from this study support Sedlacek & Brooks, (1976) sixth non-cognitive variable *availability of strong support system*. This study revealed that participants rely on family and friends as being both motivating factors and persistence factors contributing to their success in college, helping them overcome difficult challenges. Each participant, through their interview, made it known that without the support of their family and friends their educational journey would have been difficult to complete.

Five of the six participants in this study were first generation students. According to Dennis et al. (2005) these students may have encountered many obstacles due to their

parents not being able to provide them with knowledge of the college experience.

However Dennis et al. claims that parents can counteract their lack of college knowledge by playing a positive role in their child's college process, instilling the values of going to college and earning a degree, providing encouragement, and providing emotional support. The findings of this study supported this claim revealing that the parents of the first generation students not only provided emotional support, instilled the importance of earning a degree, but also provided evidence of the willingness of some parents to learn on their own about the college process. For example, the parent of one participant who has never been to college, on many occasions made it her priority to research majors and courses her daughter would have to take. This one parent's actions motivated her child and helped the student persist through a difficult time in her college career.

Similar to the findings from the Ancis et al. (2000) study, the African American students in this study found it difficult to connect to White faculty members at their institution. This study revealed similar results compared to the Schwitzer et al. (1999) study, in that the participants found it difficult to even approach faculty members outside of their race. However, all six participants at some point were able to effectively have positive interactions with White faculty members at the institution. Many of these faculty-student relationships developed into a mentoring relationship. Like previous studies suggested, findings in this study revealed that positive faculty-student interactions aided in the students learning outcomes (Tauber, 1997; Twale & Sanders, 1999; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Light, 2001). The results from this study also show the importance of interaction between students and administrators at a predominantly white institution. All

six participants recalled times when an administrator helped them persist through challenges.

Findings of this study revealed that involvement in organizations have multiple benefits. All six participants were involved in organizations on campus. Organizational involvement for all of the participants resulted in a positive impact on their social lives. The organizations that the participants were involved in on campus served as an outlet for them to voice their opinions, become a part of the campus community, and build relationships. Several of the participants mentioned how their involvement in organizations on campus was in some cases the reason they stayed at the university supporting Roberts & Styron (2010) finding that failure to become involved and engaged in organizations and activities on campus can lead to higher chances of attrition.

### **Implications**

This study revealed several factors that help African American students succeed academically at a predominantly white institution. The participants in this study were able to utilize these factors and successfully matriculate through the institution

In this study, the results indicated that students who successfully made positive interactions with faculty benefitted academically. However, the majority of these positive interactions with faculty were pursued by the student. Institutions cannot continue to allow students to be the driving force in establishing these positive interactions. Institutions need to require faculty members to initiate these interactions. The benefits of faculty-student relationships have such a great impact on the academic motivation and outcome for African American students (Light, 2001; Tauber, 1997; Twale & Sanders, 1999).

Findings from this study also revealed the importance of mentoring of African American students. Participants in this study received mentoring from various individuals such as faculty, staff, and peers. The participants found it more natural to establish relationships with Black faculty, staff, and peers. However, mentoring relationships were created with White faculty, staff, and peers as well. Institutions first need to encourage faculty and staff to create positive interactions with African American students. After those interactions are created the institution can create and develop mentoring programs between faculty, staff, and students. Establishing and requiring mentoring programs between faculty, staff, and students will create a valuable tool for the institution. Faculty and staff would not only serve as a resource for students themselves but as an information center to where a student can find resources. Mentoring programs and positive student interactions may also help the university create an environment where African American students feel comfortable and have a sense of belonging at the institution. Mentoring will help counter some of the problems African Americans might face and also help promote academic success and self-esteem (Blackwell, 1989; Grant-Thomson & Atkinson, 1997).

This study found that family is a major factor in students' academic success. Research shows that African American students who have a family member that has attended and earned a degree from college have a higher chance of academic achievement (Stewart, 2006). However, like majority of the students in this study and other African Americans students at this predominantly white institution, are first generation students. The findings from this study showed that the parents of these first generations students continue to play a pivotal role in their child's college success.

Institutions need to help and provide parents of first generation students with knowledge and skills to help assist their child throughout their college career (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005).

### **Recommendations for Practice**

This study identified numerous resources, persistence factors, and motivational factors that helped African American student matriculate through a predominantly white institution. The data collected provides student affairs practitioners with a blue print for creating an environment that will support African American students leading to academic success and retention. Several recommendations for practices are suggested.

Institutions should work towards making each student aware and comfortable within their environment. Creating a safe place for dialogue to take place when any form of racism is present on campus is crucial to resolving these issues. Developing an environment on campus for students to feel safe in voicing their concerns and opinions will create an environment that African American students feel they are a part of and want to remain in. Institutions can create this environment through several outlets such as mentoring groups, student organizations, and faculty/ staff and student interactions. Institutions need to encourage faculty and staff to be open-minded and to foster an atmosphere around them that allow individuals to voice their opinions and ideas without the fear of repercussions. Departments on campus can create discussion forums where students can come in and voice their opinion, concerns, and ideas. For those students that are afraid to speak out openly the department can create an anonymous method of submitting their concerns. Not only will this recommendation provide benefits to the

students but to the faculty and staff as well that might need help on improving their interactions with students.

The institution could create and implement a program that helps develop the knowledge and awareness for parents of first generation college students. Parents of first generation college students could play a more pivotal role in the lives of their children if they are more aware of the challenges they would be facing entering and while attending the institution. Equipping parents with the knowledge of the college experience will help parents better guide and assist their child during difficult times. Institutions can provide parents newsletters throughout the years that their child is attending the university, letting them know of some of the things their child might be experiencing. Also, institutions can create workshops during student orientations geared toward the parents of first generation students informing them about the college experience. Providing parents with tips and skills on how to motivate and assist their child through their collegiate career will help them understand what their student is going through at the institution.

Creating an atmosphere where students have the opportunity to engage in activities with other students outside of their race will help students gain a sense of belonging to the university as a whole instead of just belonging to a particular group. Developing events that foster not only to one culture but to the culture of many will allow students to become more aware of diverse populations. Student affairs professionals should survey students about events they would like to participate in and from the results work with students to create events that will bring students together as one student body instead of several sub groups.

Student affairs professionals need to create training programs that encourage faculty and staff to be more open and sensitive to the needs of all students. The training program should not only be conducted by student affairs personnel but by the students as well. Current students will be able to assist faculty and staff with creative ways of starting positive interactions with students. Once those relationships start to build the next step would be implementing faculty and staff mentoring programs through each department. Creating an atmosphere for students to engage in conversations about future goals could create a more relaxed environment for students both inside and outside of the classroom.

Finally, an institution should have several activities or involvement fairs throughout the school year that bring together offices and departments across campus to show students what resources are available. Institutions need to rid themselves of the idea that students will seek out these resources on their own. Assuming that students will read flyers or find their way to resources on their own should not be the primary method for students to find resources. Resource fairs on campus will bring the resources directly to the students. Frequent fairs held in residence halls, academic buildings, lobbies, multicultural centers, and other locations where student presence is heavier will help bring the resources students need directly to them.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study identified several opportunities for future research that this institution and other institutions could consider to obtain a better idea of what persistence factors, motivational factors, and resources students utilize. Those recommendations for future research are:



1. Examine the difference between persistence factors, motivational factors, and resources utilized by African American males and African American females. A larger sample population of male and female African American students than the one used in this study will be needed in order to acquire more reliable data.
2. Examine the difference between persistence factors, motivational factors, and resources utilized by first generation African American students compared to non-first generation African American students at a predominantly white institution. A larger sample population of first generation and non-first generation African American students will be needed in order to acquire more reliable data.
3. Examine and compare the same study conducted here with Latino, Native American, or any other minority students at a predominantly white institution.
4. Examine what persistence factors, motivational factors and resources White students utilize at a predominantly white institution.
5. Examine what persistence factors, motivational factors and resources African American students attending historically black colleges and universities utilize.

## **Conclusion**

The six participants in this study provided the data to answer the research questions on what motivates African American students to stay at the institution, what persistence factors influence African American students through to graduation, and what resources African American students identify as helping them successfully graduate from

the institution. This study incorporated a qualitative approach with the interviews being conducted in a semi-structured style. All the participants in this study traveled a different path to reach their senior year or graduation. However, there were similarities between participants' motivational factors, persistence factors, and resources utilized.

The participants all received motivation from various sources. The three major sources of motivation were internal, family, and friends. All six participants identified times when they motivated themselves to continue to achieve academic success. Some of the participants constantly told themselves that they belonged at the institution and that they would earn a degree. Family was also a major source for all the participants. Family motivation emerged including parents, brothers, siblings, spouses, and extended family as well. Motivation from family has shown to be an important factor in helping these students matriculate from freshmen to senior year. Motivation from family starts before students enter college and is needed throughout their college journey. Motivation from friends was another huge factor for all of the participants. Being away in college, many of the participants rarely had time to connect with family as much as they would have liked to. Friends became family for these participants at the institution. The friends of the participants became crucial motivational factors on campus during various times of their collegiate experience.

All the participants in the study experienced a variety of challenges and relied on different individuals to help them persist through those challenges. The two major sources of persistence factors were family and friends. The six participants all identified times when they faced challenges that could have hindered their college success. Each time the participants relied on either family or friends to help them persist through the

challenge they were facing. Some of the participants mentioned that without their family and friends helping them through some of the challenges they faced they would have not made it to their senior year or graduation.

All of the participants stated that resources provided by the institution such as offices, departments, administrators, and faculty all contributed to their academic success and helped them matriculate through the institution. Administrators and faculty members served as motivational and persistence factors for several of the students. Helping them deal with challenging and motivating them to continue to work hard and strive for success. Offices and departments on campus provided the participants with academic support at various points of their collegiate experience.

All the participants agreed that changes need to be taken on campus. Some mentioned that they would like to see the university do a better job of making students aware of resources available to them. Several participants stated that more needs to be done to diversify the staff and faculty. Most of the participants were able to establish positive interactions with faculty and administrators however; they still felt it is necessary to increase the number of African American faculty and administrators on campus. In regards to faculty, participants also mentioned that some faculty need to be exposed to some sort of training that promotes diversity and diversity awareness in the classroom.

The findings of this study supported the literature that was presented in chapter two. The results of this study provided a personal look into areas which the institution and administrators need to address to continue to help African American students matriculate through the university and achieve academic success.

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## Appendix A

### Email to Participants

Potential Participants,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Aaron White, from the Counseling and Student development department at Eastern Illinois University. The purpose of this study will be to determine what factors influence African American college students persistence at a predominately White institution located in the Midwest. In identifying what factors influence persistence of African Americans, the staff and faculty will be able to better address the needs of its African American student body and develop appropriate support mechanisms. This study will also identify factors influencing persistence related to gender. The future findings of this study will help higher education professionals develop programs and strategies for retaining Black students.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher that will be video recorded. The researcher will transcribe the recordings to text. Following the transcribing process the researcher will begin to code the transcription using line-by-line analysis. Also, two other researchers will review the transcripts and develop categories independently. The two reviewers will receive a hard copy with no names of the participants that will be returned to the researcher. After the categories are created the researcher will ask the participant to review the transcripts and categories created to validate the accuracy. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

## Appendix B

### Participant Consent Form

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

##### Perceived Persistence Factors for African American Seniors at a Midwest University

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Aaron White, from the Counseling and Student development department at Eastern Illinois University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

#### • PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study will be to determine what factors influence African American persistence at a predominately located in the Midwest. In identifying what factors influence persistence of African Americans the staff and faculty will be able to better address the needs of its Black student body and develop appropriate support mechanisms. This study will also identify factors influencing persistence related to gender. The future findings of this study will help higher education professionals develop programs and strategies for retaining Black students.

#### • PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher that will be video recorded. The researcher will transcribe the recordings to text. Following the transcribing process the researcher will begin to code the transcription using line-by-line analysis. Also, two other researchers will review the transcripts and develop categories independently. Reviewers will receive a hard copy with no names of the participants that will be returned to the researcher. After the categories are created the researcher will ask the participant to review the transcripts and categories created to validate the accuracy.

#### • POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Potential risk and discomforts might arise for participants through some of the interview questions. Question might evoke thoughts or memories that the participant has tried to suppress. Participants may also refuse to answer any questions they do not want to answer.

#### • POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The future findings of this study will help higher education professionals develop programs and strategies for retaining Black students.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

The audio and video recording of the interview will only be reviewed by the researcher. The researcher will transcribe the recordings to text. Following the transcribing process the researcher will begin to code the transcription using line-by-line analysis. Also, two other researchers will review the transcripts and develop categories independently. Reviewers will receive a hard copy with no names of the participants that will be returned to the researcher. After the categories are created the researcher will ask the participant to review the transcripts and categories created to validate the accuracy. All of the transcriptions from the interviews will be stored in a file cabinet located in the researchers' home and maintained on a password protected computer that only the researcher has access to.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Dr. Timm

Phone: (309)581-5327

Email: [dtimm@eiu.edu](mailto:dtimm@eiu.edu)

Aaron White

Phone: (309)750-0232

Email: [adwhite@eiu.edu](mailto:adwhite@eiu.edu)

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board  
Eastern Illinois University  
600 Lincoln Ave.

Charleston, IL 61920  
Telephone: (217) 581-8576  
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

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I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

---

Printed Name of Participant

---

Signature of Participant

Date

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

---

Signature of Investigator

Date

## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

(Briefly describe the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and consent form.)

Questions:

1. Tell me about yourself?
2. Are you a first generation student?
3. Where did you grow up?
  - a. Neighborhood
  - b. High School
4. Tell me about why you chose to come to EIU?
5. What were your first reactions or impressions of the institution?
6. What are some of the challenges you faced at EIU?
7. How did you get through these challenges (people, groups, offices, programs)?
8. How did you identify these resources?
9. What motivated you to stay at EIU?
10. What organizations did you become a part of? Why?
11. How did you find out about these organizations?
12. How would you compare your experience to those of your White classmates?
13. If you had the opportunity to make one change that would better help African American matriculate through college what would it be?

Appendix D  
**IRB Approval**

May 8, 2012

Aaron White  
Counseling and Student Development

Thank you for submitting the research protocol titled, "Perceived Persistence Factors for African American Seniors at a Midwestern University" for review by the Eastern Illinois University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has approved this research protocol following an expedited review procedure. IRB review has determined that the protocol involves no more than minimal risk to subjects and satisfies all of the criteria for approval of research.

This protocol has been given the IRB number 12-098. You may proceed with this study from 5/8/2012 to 5/7/2013. You must submit Form E, Continuation Request, to the IRB by 4/7/2013 if you wish to continue the project beyond the approval expiration date.

This approval is valid only for the research activities, timeline, and subjects described in the above named protocol. IRB policy requires that any changes to this protocol be reported to, and approved by, the IRB before being implemented. You are also required to inform the IRB immediately of any problems encountered that could adversely affect the health or welfare of the subjects in this study. Please contact me, or the Compliance Coordinator at 581-8576, in the event of an emergency. All correspondence should be sent to:

Institutional Review Board  
c/o Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
Telephone: 581-8576  
Fax: 217-581-7181  
Email: [eiuirb@www.eiu.edu](mailto:eiuirb@www.eiu.edu)

Upon completion of your research project, please submit Form G, Completion of Research Activities, to the IRB, c/o the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs.

Thank you for your assistance, and the best of success with your research.

Richard Cavanaugh, Chairperson  
Institutional Review Board  
Telephone: 581-6205  
Email: [recavanaugh@eiu.edu](mailto:recavanaugh@eiu.edu)